

Frequently asked questions about septic systems and the Maine Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules.

How do I know if I need a soil test?

The general rule of thumb is that a soil test (site evaluation) is needed any time sewage, wastewater, or human waste is being placed beneath the ground in a location where there was none before. This includes all first time development, all replacement systems, and expansions of existing systems. This also includes pit privies, greywater disposal areas, and full septic systems.

How do I know if I need a septic system permit?

If you needed a site evaluation, you will also need a permit to install the system for which the evaluation was done. If you aren't sure, contact your Local Plumbing Inspector or the Division.

The design my Site Evaluator gave me will be expensive to install. Can I install a holding tank instead?

Generally speaking, holding tanks are an option of last resort, because they do not solve the problem of wastewater treatment, they just relocate the problem. If a bona-fide system can be installed on a property, holding tanks are not allowed. Further, while the initial installation costs may be lower, pumping costs over the long term can be prohibitive (especially for year round use). In fact, a holding tank can not be used for any first time residential development unless the Municipality has adopted a Model Holding Tank Ordinance from the Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules, which makes the Municipality responsible for maintaining the holding tank.

I bought my undeveloped lot many years ago, and it recently failed a site evaluation. Is my lot "grandfathered" for a septic system because of the length of time I have owned it?

No. Your lot is only grandfathered for the level of development it had when the relevant standards were adopted. In this instance, the Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules were adopted in July of 1974. Any first time sewage disposal systems to be installed since then must meet the minimum site suitability requirements of the Rules.

If my undeveloped lot fails a site evaluation, is there some form of advanced treatment unit that I can install instead of a conventional system?

No. All first time system designs must meet the minimum standards of the Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules.

If my undeveloped lot fails a site evaluation, can I install fill soils to create a suitable site?

No. Fill soils are allowed for first time systems only if the fill has been in place since at least 1974.

My existing septic system has failed. What should I do?

The first thing to do is pump out your septic tank, to eliminate wastewater flow to the malfunctioning disposal area, and keep it pumped out until the system is replaced. You must also contact a licensed Site Evaluator to

design a replacement system. She or he will provide you with the necessary design to apply for a plumbing permit to install the system, from the Local Plumbing Inspector.

My existing septic system has failed. What happens if my lot does not pass a site evaluation?

The Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules take into account that developed properties may have difficulties meeting the minimum standards of the Rules. Therefore, the Rules have provisions for issuing replacement system variances which will accommodate the existing development on the property, so that use of the property may continue.

I don't have enough cash to install the replacement system. Is there help available?

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (1-800-452-1942) offers several community-based loans and grants. The Maine State Housing Authority offers the FIX-ME program for low income homeowners ((207) 626-4600 or 1-800-452-4668). Many banks and credit unions offer home improvement loans. Finally, by statute (30-A MRSA, ss 3428(3)(B)), a municipality may install a system on a lot, and recover the costs through a special tax assessment.

Do you need more information?

For more information, please contact the Division of Health Engineering at:

Department of Human Services
Bureau of Health
Division of Health Engineering
10 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0010

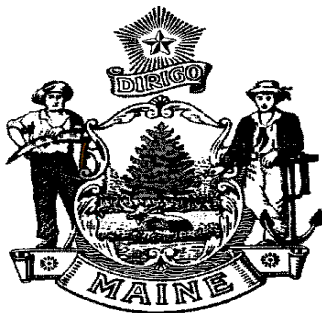
or contact the Division at any of the numbers below:

Tel (207) 287-5689 Fax: (207) 287-3165

TTY: (207) 287-2070
(Deaf/Hard of Hearing)

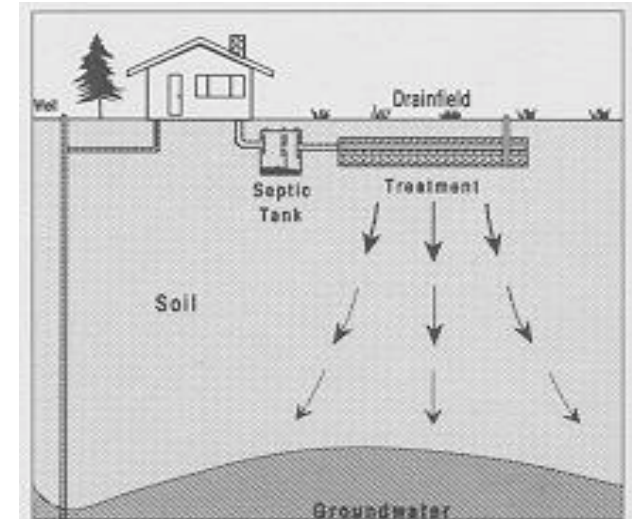
Internet:

<http://www.state.me.us/dhs/eng/plumb/plumb.htm>



Department of Human Services
Bureau of Health
Division of Health Engineering
10 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0010

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This brochure is intended to provide general guidance regarding some common questions about the Maine Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules. This is not a definitive guide to those Rules.

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